

SEATTLE, HOUSTON COMPANIES PLAN MONTANA BIODIESEL PROJECT

By Matt Gouras

HELENA, Mont.- A Seattle company and a Houston firm say they are launching a project that will grow enough seed oil in Montana to create 100 million gallons of biodiesel by 2010.

Sustainable Oils will be a joint venture of Seattle-based Targeted Growth, which says it has developed a new camelina seed, and a Houston firm that sells biodiesel, a spokesman said late Monday.

John Williams, who works for Targeted Growth, said his company has developed a new strain of camelina that is better suited to producing biodiesel and can grow in marginal climates.

"They've improved the native camelina seed and optimized it for biofuel," Williams said.

The company has partnered with Green Earth Fuels. Both planned to unveil details of the project at a Tuesday news conference with Gov. Brian Schweitzer and U.S. Sens. Max Baucus and Jon Tester.

Schweitzer said in a statement that the project will help eastern Montana's economy. Baucus called it a "a huge win for Montana farmers," while Tester, a Big Sandy farmer, said he believes Montana is on the verge of becoming a worldwide leader in alternative fuels.

Williams said as much as 1 million acres will be needed to grow the crop to reach the target of 100 million gallons, which the companies called the "single largest U.S. contract for the unique biodiesel-specific feedstock."

Williams said farmers will be able to profit from a crop that can grow in marginal fields and works in rotation with other crops, like wheat.

"It's good for farmers. It's good for the state. It's good for the country, and it's good for the environment," he said.